

4 Important Considerations for Homeschooling

Helping to meet your child's needs for academic challenges and well-being based on the latest psychological research.

As homeschooling has become an increasingly popular option, it is important to consider multiple factors in making this educational decision. This resource is a starting point to help you make homeschooling decisions based on the latest psychological research about teaching, learning, behavior, development, and social-emotional and motivational drivers.

There are four key issues to consider as you think about homeschooling: (1) the general academic needs and well-being of your child; (2) family relationships and community resources; (3) educational resources; and (4) compliance with state regulations. You should also consider the resources available to your family such as the teaching capacity of caregivers, access to instructional materials or web-based programs, and to other community resources. Finally, state laws differ; it is important to be familiar with them.

The APA Center for Psychology in Schools and Education is invested in the social, emotional, and cognitive development of children. Our goal with this resource is to assist parents with the decision-making process and to provide information to help promote positive outcomes while not attempting to influence their choice.

High school

The high school years focus on academic learning while allowing students to explore their personal interests in greater depth. High school students thrive in situations that give them purpose and agency. Students have a heightened sense of wanting to make an impact on their community. High school students often propose ideas that may initially seem idealistic or unrealistic but that hold great meaning to them. Without strong problem-solving and social skills your child is likely to face challenges in postsecondary education or career (Ganske & Fisher, 2009; Thornton, 2005).

Homeschooling can work well in high school when families are ready to provide the following:

- Supportive relationships and high but realistic expectations.
- Curriculum and instruction sufficient to obtain a high school diploma or the equivalent with adequate preparation for college, a trade, or other postsecondary training.
- In-depth instruction in English, math, science, and social studies.
- Experiences completing long-term projects where your child needs to set goals, organize the task, and pace their work toward a deadline.
- Projects and authentic experiences that connect the academic curriculum with local community challenges, allowing your child to collaborate with others and contribute to solving problems for the community.
- Information about and opportunities to explore a variety of postsecondary or career choices similar to those available to students attending out-of-home schools.
- Experiences in problem-solving and critical thinking that encourage relationships with other adults and expose your child to a range of worldviews to prepare them for life after high school.
- Opportunities to create strong and stable relationships with peers.
- Experiences with people of different ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds in books or in person.

Setting expectations

Resources to help you get a sense of traditional expectations for learning, behavior, motivation, and development.

- [APA Top 20 principles for pre-K to 12 education](#)
- [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning](#)
- [National Council for the Social Studies](#)
- [National Council of Teachers of English](#)
- [National Council of Teachers of Mathematics](#)

1. General child needs

Whether you decide to homeschool your child or send them to school, children have certain needs that must be met for them to grow and flourish. Learn what these needs are and get ideas for how the homeschool environment might meet them.

Academic engagement in homeschooling environments

Children and youth will be most motivated and learn best when material is somewhat challenging or just above their current level of knowledge and skill. When the work is too difficult, students tend to become anxious and frustrated and may give up. When material is too easy, they may become bored. When material is somewhat challenging, students will feel motivated and are most likely to feel good about themselves and their accomplishments. Parents can pre-test to determine what students already know about a topic or subject and what materials might be moderately challenging for their child. Students are most likely to be exposed to moderately challenging tasks when curricula are sequential and increasing in difficulty (Ganske & Fisher, 2009; Li et al., 2014).

High school students have generally developed a sense of their strengths and weaknesses as well as their interests. Still, small successes can build their sense of efficacy even in tasks where they do not feel as strong. For example, make sure your child has mastered linear functions before moving on to quadratic and exponential functions. Students with strengths in an area may be eligible to take advanced placement or college-level courses for further challenge.

Managing emotions, behavior, and attention in homeschooling environments

In addition to gaining academic knowledge and skills, students also need to learn how to self-regulate their behavior and emotions to meet the demands of everyday situations (Hoerr, 2020). Self-regulation will be important throughout students' lives. Learning environments can provide opportunities for students to learn and practice strategies to calm themselves when they are frustrated or upset and pump themselves up when preparing for a task. These environments can help children resist distraction and refrain

from impulsive behavior. Self-regulatory skills that predict success in academic endeavors include tackling tasks in a step-by-step manner, developing goals and strategies before the task, monitoring progress during the task, and reflecting on what did and did not work well after the task.

High school students have developed many self-regulatory skills. However, it may still be a challenge for them to plan for and persist on long-term projects and use problem-solving to prepare for future goals. High school students can benefit from taking more initiative and responsibility for their learning, which can also be encouraged and supported in the learning environment.

Social skill development in homeschooling environments

Social interactions are important throughout students' lives. Students need social skills to establish and maintain positive relationships with peers and friends. Strong social relationships enhance academic achievement during the school years and occupational success post-graduation.

Relationships with peers promote companionship, empathy, practice in joint problem-solving and conflict resolution, emotional support, and opportunities to engage in creative play. Learning environments can allow students to engage with peers through collaborative activities where they develop skills for active listening, clear communication, and the negotiation of mutually agreeable solutions to challenges. Optimal learning environments also provide opportunities for unstructured peer interaction, including eating together and participating in games and sports. Community activities like speech, debate, 4-H, scouts, sports, and other activities provide opportunities for youth to learn and practice the skills they need currently and in the future.

One important aspect of social development is children's appreciation of and value for others' ethnic, racial, and cultural identities. Adult models help students understand others' distinct identities and perspectives and approach those differences with interest and respect. In addition, adults play an important role in supporting students' exploration and curiosity about their own identities and the strengths and assets that come with those identities.

High school students typically have developed social skills but still need opportunities to collaborate with peers and may need guidance with group instruction. They also need free time with peers to build and maintain friendships that are critical to their ongoing social development and general well-being. Challenges for high school students include understanding group dynamics, managing the influence of peer crowds on the formation of their own identity, and negotiating ongoing social interactions. They benefit from

discussions about these challenges and from supportive environments as they develop their social groups.

Providing a consistent, safe, and supportive atmosphere for learning in homeschooling environments

Students learn best in structured environments where they know what to expect. Consistent schedules enable them to plan and organize themselves for their learning activities. A consistent routine reinforces study skills that they will need throughout their school years and beyond (Duvall et al., 1997; Duvall et al., 2004; Guterman & Neuman, 2018). A safe learning environment that supports students' successes and setbacks will encourage them to take risks in their learning and explore new ideas and interests.

High school students can manage their schedules for instruction and studying and can provide input into what they will study according to their interests. Students develop accountability for completing their work and feel a sense of accomplishment when learning environments include clear expectations and guidelines. An environment that views mistakes and setbacks as opportunities to learn can help students take risks in their learning and persist through difficult material. Focusing on students' efforts and strategies rather than on whether they are "smart in" or "good at" a subject will help to encourage a growth mindset, where students feel they can build their skills and become stronger in a particular area.

Physical activity in homeschooling environments

Physical activity is critical for school-aged children. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends one hour of moderate to vigorous exercise each day. This includes aerobic activity (e.g., running or riding a bike) at least three times weekly and strength-building exercise (e.g., climbing, push-ups) three times weekly. Children are differently abled, and families can assess children's personal strengths and physical abilities to support their physical development. The US Department of Health and Human Services (2018) published physical activity guidelines for all Americans, with specific recommendations for children and adolescents.

It is wise for adolescents from 13 to 18 years of age to strive for an hour of physical activity daily. They are most motivated to stay physically active when they have role models in the home. Parents who exercise regularly and include their children are particularly good examples, as are active older siblings. Daily exercise can be as

straightforward as walking the dog or running errands on foot or may involve structured activities such as team sports or jogging. Teenagers frequently enjoy socially oriented physical activities, such as shooting baskets or swimming in a nearby lake or pool where they can meet friends (Rink, 2009).

References and Resources

Academic challenge

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Safe, consistent environment

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Physical activity

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2. Family and community resources

Locating resources within the homeschooling family or access to others in the community who are homeschooling will be important as families get a sense of effective tools and experiences.

Questions to consider:

- What community resources are available to support your child's education? For example, are there museums, zoos, cultural centers, or summer programs that offer educational opportunities for children?
- Does your family or town have dedicated space or organized sports programs to promote physical activity?
- What computer or technology resources are available to your child?
- How comfortable are you in taking on a teaching role with your child(ren)? For example, managing their behavior during instruction and learning activities?
- Do you have access to a public library and/or books at home that will engage your child and promote learning?

Family and community resources are very important for high school students: mastering more advanced concepts may require extracurricular activities to facilitate a detailed understanding of academic subject matter. Because peer relationships are a crucial component of adolescent social development, active engagement with peer organizations and activities also becomes critically important in the high school grades. Many local school districts will allow homeschooled students to participate in extracurricular activities (e.g., chorus, athletics, clubs), and these opportunities can be invaluable. High school students also need supervised experience in planning, time management, study skills, and independent exploration of academic and career interests; all of these experiences can be supported through family and community resources. Fostering connections with the community for high school students can facilitate work-related experiences, which may aid in the transition from high school to a career or, for college-motivated students, to postsecondary education.

3. Educational resources

Many factors need to be considered when choosing a curriculum and preparing for homeschool instruction. Parents will want to review outcome data or evidence to support strong learning outcomes for youth who complete the materials you intend to use. You will also want to determine how well the intended materials will meet your child's individual learning needs and will address any state requirements (Harmon & Jones, 2005; Stacki et al., 2020).

Beyond books and workbooks, consider what other resources you will use to supplement direct instruction, such as audio, visual, and other multimedia materials and exploratory and experiential activities. Community colleges often partner with local high schools to offer college course opportunities. Preparation for college testing (ACT, SAT) also begins for most students in their sophomore or junior year. Parents need to assess how prepared they are to teach all academic subjects and to manage behavior during the learning process throughout the day (Lois, 2010). Parents need to plan ahead and set both short-term and long-term academic goals for their homeschooled children.

A wide variety of resources are available, many for purchase and many as part of an online package (Hanna, 2012). Every child has a right to a free appropriate public education, and as a part of that you can reach out to your local public school and ask to talk to grade level teachers, a school psychologist, or the principal about what curriculum they are using for subjects in your child's grade level. Some districts also allow flexi-schooling in which some subjects (e.g., physical education, art, calculus) or services (e.g., speech-language, occupational or physical therapy, reading specialist, counseling) are provided by the school and other instruction is delivered at home (Kunzman & Gaither, 2020).

Here are key questions parents can consider.

What curriculum or curricular materials would you plan to use for homeschooling?

Some parents love teaching math and others will want to find more support for this subject. As you review possible curricula, ask yourself: Do you have the skills and knowledge within academic subject areas to support your child's learning? If not, who else can help you deliver the curriculum?

- Have you reviewed many materials or participated in any state convention or curriculum fairs that showcase a variety of homeschooling publications and products?
- Is there any evidence showing that children and youth learn well from completing your intended curriculum materials?
- How does your curriculum integrate different instructional experiences that promote learning, such as direct instruction (i.e., structured, sequenced, and led by teachers) and discovery learning (i.e., students construct their own understanding and knowledge of a topic through experiences and then reflect on those experiences)?
- Will your intended curriculum meet academic subject or testing requirements (if any are required) for your state?
- Will your intended curriculum meet all special learning needs your child may have (such as learning challenges or giftedness)?

What other educational resources do you have available to homeschool effectively?

- Do you have a computer and access to the internet?
- Do you have access to supplemental learning materials such as videos, interactive lesson materials online, or other forms of multimedia resources?
- Is there a platform or group of other homeschooling parents you can engage with to share educational resources? Can you partner with public schools in your district?

How long do you plan to homeschool (short-term or through completion of high school)?

- Have you set short- and long-term goals for your child's education?
- Have you developed a solid yet flexible curriculum to map out your child's school year in advance?
- Do you have a plan to assess and monitor your child's academic progress?

At this level, curriculum needs are broader and generally subjects are covered in more depth. Greater subject expertise will be necessary for instruction. In addition, if your child plans to attend college or university after high school, consulting with school

academic coordinators and programs to which your child intends to apply can help ensure your child has the prerequisite knowledge and experiences expected of applicants. Additional considerations include: having access to career and vocational guidance for your child, including sufficient preparation for college entrance exams (if required); and understanding whether homeschooling will lead to a high school diploma recognized by your state or if preparation for your child to take the exam for a general equivalency degree (GED) is needed.

Resources

- [Public resources available to homeschoolers](#)
Check with your school district to find out what resources are available to homeschooling families. Some states allow homeschoolers to participate in public school classes and extracurricular activities. In other states, the decision is left up to individual school districts. Flexi-schooling may be an option for your child.
- [Home School Legal Defense Association. Starting strong.](#)
Includes resources on what to teach, grading, record keeping, testing and evaluation, special needs, high school, and beyond.

4. Meeting government regulations

It is wise for families considering homeschooling to be aware of their local, state, or territory regulations that govern homeschooling. For example, in the United States, regulations vary by state and by grade level. Be sure to check the regulations listed for your state; you can find some of them listed on the [Home School Legal Defense Association website](#).

Consider what your state or local government requires. Are there regulations related to any of the following issues?

- Do you need to provide formal notification of the decision to homeschool?
- Is there a mandatory age when students must enroll in some form of schooling?
- Do parents need to meet teacher qualifications to provide homeschooling?
- Are parents required to include specific subjects in their homeschool curricula?
- Is there a minimum number of hours of instruction per week?

- Do parents need to conduct regular assessments to monitor children's academic progress? If so, are you required to share these results with the government?
- Are homeschooled children required to complete standardized tests? If so, how often?
- Are homeschooled children eligible for participation in extracurricular activities?

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